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Article

Minority youth, everyday racism and public spaces in contemporary Russia

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of global change and post-Soviet political transformation on diasporic youth cultural practices and experience in Krasnodar, a city in southern Russia. While young Armenians' leisure spaces are characterized by inclusive notions of ethnic plurality and tolerance, sometimes individuals are racialized or ethnicized when they pass through public spaces. Young Armenians' leisure spaces are ethnically structured, but not ethnically exclusive. This article challenges the view that young people from ethnic minorities are passive recipients of everyday racism. Instead, it is suggested that young Armenians have routinized their responses to racism and xenophobia in their everyday practices, and so are able to undermine the dominant political discourse.

Keywords

Armenian youth, everyday racism, leisure, public space, Russia, youth cultural practice

Introduction

Recent years have seen an increase of interest in the study of the complex relationship between youth cultural identities and place. In the UK, this type of research has been conducted primarily in cities with multi-ethnic communities in order to examine ethnicity and changing youth cultures (Back, 1996; Gunter and Watt, 2009; Watt and Stenson, 1998). Alongside this work in the UK, changing youth cultures and place have been examined in the peripheries (Pilkington et al., 2002; Salo, 2003). All of these studies recognize the complexities of young people's cultural experiences in a global world, and universal explanations have been replaced by a concern to acknowledge differences and the plurality of voices. At the same time, the importance of place and neighbourhood for the formation of youth identities is accentuated (Back, 2007; Gidley, 2007; Nayak, 2003,

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2004; Taylor and Addison, 2009). These discussions on the ways in which young people inhabit the spaces of the city show that multiculturalism and inter-ethnic dialogue exist alongside 'stark new divisions and old hatreds' (Back, 2007: 52). Back argues that the ways in which young adults inhabit spaces in the city can be described as tactics that young people use to 'live with and through difference', and 'make bearable what is unbearable' (2007: 52).

Young Armenians' everyday lives in Krasnodar are also marked by a dual experience of inclusion and exclusion. While their leisure spaces are characterized by inclusive notions of ethnic plurality and tolerance, sometimes individuals are racialized or ethnicized when they pass through public spaces. Public spaces are understood as complex systems in the formulation of youth histories (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Robinson, 2009). Such public spaces can be parks or streets, where young people 'hang out' together. These are spaces that young people use in response to their own needs and constraints. In this article, public spaces are explored as sites of cultural 'inclusion' as well as 'exclusion'. Although the article shows that the socially condoned presence of racism against minorities is a significant difference between the Russian and West European experiences, this analysis also indicates similarities to diasporic youth living in West European states under conditions of increasing tensions over migrant difference.

The subsequent empirical analysis is based on six months' ethnographic fieldwork in Krasnodar, southern Russia. Armenians, a major diasporic community in Russia, were selected for this research project due to the scale of their international presence. The Armenian Diaspora currently numbers more than ten million, making it one of the largest as well as oldest Diasporas in the world. Despite this fact, little research and analysis has been devoted to the subject of Armenian youth. This case study attempts to address this deficiency and to reveal the similarities between Armenian youth and other young people in diasporic communities around the world. In Krasnodar itself, Armenians enjoy a significant prominence. While there are 1,330,491 Armenians in Russia, constituting 4.1 percent of the population, in Krasnodar krai Armenians are the second largest ethnic group, accounting for 5.4 percent of the region's total population (Krasnodar krai Committee for Governmental Statistics, 2005).

Dominant discourses of ethnic belonging: the national versus the local

Questions of ethnicity and ethnic relations have been part of the political landscape in Imperial Russia and the former Soviet Union. Despite Vladimir Putin's attempts to separate ethnicity from identity (Fish, 2001) with his recentralisation programme and his nation-building project that emphasised the importance of Russia's diversity, ethnic problems none the less remain. Statements such as 'Russia for Russians' or 'Russia needs Russian order' have become common components of popular and state led discourse in Russia (Fadeicheva, 2007: 69). The ethnic clashes between Russians and 'Caucasians' in Kondopoga in August 2006 (Shlapentokh, 2010), show that despite Putin's efforts to lessen the significance of ethnicity for Russia's identity politics, at the end of his presidency in 2008 the ethnic factor still remains vital.

In media discourse, the terms 'immigration' and 'ethnic migrants', receive substantial coverage due mainly to the extent of unregulated immigration into Russia and the absence of programmes designed to integrate immigrants in mainstream Russian life. In the space of the past two decades, Russia has gone from being almost entirely insulated against international migration flows to being the second biggest recipient in the world after the USA (Mansoor and Quillin, 2006). More than 11m migrants from the post-Soviet states came to Russia in the period 1992–2006 (Korobkov, 2008). Hence Russia had to design and implement a migration policy against a background of almost total inexperience of managing these migration flows.

The substantial influx of migrants, especially from the Caucasus and Central Asia, combined with the shrinking ethnic Russian population and the war in Chechnya, have led to increasing levels of xenophobia among Russians. For example, according to opinion surveys conducted in Russia in 2005, 57 percent of respondents held negative attitudes towards immigrants. Similar surveys conducted in 2007 show that 57 percent of respondents believed that the government should impose stricter restrictions on immigration into the Russian Federation (Dubas, 2008). Although on many occasions Putin has stressed the importance of migrants for improving the supply of labour and alleviating Russia's shrinking population, at state level and in media discourse migration is still portrayed largely as a threat to state security, disturbing Russia's 'ethnic' balance. Only recently, President Medvedev fuelled anxiety when he asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs to control and prevent the rise of criminality among migrants (Lenta.ru, 2009).

Taking into account the local context of Krasnodar krai, the situation does not change very much. Krasnodar krai's history is characterized by extensive migration processes. For example, with the disintegration of the Soviet Empire, Krasnodar krai experienced new large-scale in-migration from ethnic conflicts erupting in Nagorno Karabakh (1988–94), Abkhazia (1992–94) and Chechnya (1994–96 and 1999–2001). As with the whole of Russia, Krasnodar krai's authorities faced exceptional difficulties in developing an effective migration regime, as they did not inherit an existing migration regime from the former Soviet Union. As a political reaction to these migration waves which, as mentioned previously, were perceived as a security threat and a threat to a 'healthy' ethnic balance, the authorities exploited regional conditions and institutionalized discrimination against migrants and ethnic minorities. At present, in public discourse the emphasis is mainly placed on the fact that every fifth person in the krai is a migrant (Ziemer, forthcoming). Regardless of when they settled in Krasnodar krai, migrants, if not all ethnic minorities and including Armenians, are juxtaposed with the problem of illegal migrants. Thus, the local governor proclaims that regional authorities 'will look ... at the endings of surnames!' (Panchenko, 2003). Surnames can indicate a person's ethnic belonging: for example, surnames ending with '-ian' are Armenian.

Coexisting with this negative approach to migration is the public discourse of promoting cultural diversity, which also exists on a federal level. Despite ethnocentric political discourses pertaining at the regional level, 'ethnic voluntary associations' are supported and promoted in official regional politics. In line with the discourse of promoting cultural diversity, Krasnodar krai's government officially declares that its politics are directed towards the preservation of a civic world and inter-ethnic

agreements, supporting the principle of equality for the representatives of different nationalities, religious beliefs of those living in the krai, and the strengthening of mutual respect and understanding between them. (Addendum No. 1 to the Decree of the Head of the Administration of Krasnodar krai, 25 July 2002, No. 826, cited in Osipov, 2004: 14)

Research participants' friendship patterns

Friendships are formed primarily on the basis of common interests rather than ethnic belonging. The majority of research participants form friendships consistent with residence and leisure activity as well as their place of study, but not according to ethnicity. Most of their closest friends are from their immediate neighbourhood: the street or block of flats in which they live, and new friends are made later, for example at university. Such behaviour is pointed out in other studies on ethnic minority groups in the British context (Ali, 2003; Wulff, 1995). Nonetheless, Reynolds' (2007) research on friendships among young Caribbean people in Britain shows that, although her respondents have mixed ethnic friendships, only 'best friends' or 'closest friends' have the same ethnic background. Larger forces have an influence on the ways that young people form their friendships, but it is life circumstances combined with shared values and interests that come to the fore when choosing friends. As Aram, aged 18, tells us:[1]

Interviewer: Tell me about your friends.
Aram: I've got friends everywhere and lots of them, Russians, Armenians, Georgians, Dagestanis.

Noteworthy here, is that the question of friends often led research participants to talk about the different nationalities of their friends. Such a reaction can be explained in two ways. First, time and again research participants made the assumption that I was only interested in nationality issues and so answered my question by discussing the different nationalities of their friends. Second, awareness of one's nationality is strong in Russia, as the above discussion indicates, and is encouraged by a regional political discourse that emphasizes the importance of ethnic belonging. However, while nationality is recognized and referenced routinely, this does not mean that friends are chosen according to nationality:

> I only hang around with Armenian friends. I don't choose my friends; I met them because of my attitude to life and interests. It just happens that I have only Armenian friends, it's just life. (Lusine, aged 21)

Lusine only has Armenian friends because of life circumstances, the environment she grew up in and so forth, but she did not choose them herself. Earlier in the interview, for example, she told me that in her class at school there were 25 pupils, of which 17 were Armenian. The demographic circumstances of her school and her immediate

neighbourhood had, thus, determined that most of her friends are Armenian. The opposite process is described by Lala, whose friends are mainly Russian – although, for her too, choice of friends is determined by the demographics in her school:[2]

> I was the only Armenian [in the class]. I had good, close relations with everyone ... You know, my friend Lusine went to a school where her class was mainly Armenian. I was shocked at that. (Lala, aged 20)

Public spaces as sites of cultural inclusion

The negotiation of public spaces is an important aspect of young people's leisure. While these public spaces may contain a significant 'ethnic mix', they can also be spaces where young Armenians encounter xenophobia and racism. For young Armenians in Krasnodar, finding places for leisure activities such as clubbing is not difficult. Krasnodar's infrastructure is well established, and new bars and clubs and other leisure centres seem to open every couple of months. Although these places are there, and most of the young men make use of them, the majority of Armenian girls reject these places, as it is considered inappropriate for a girl to spend her time there (Ziemer, 2010). Armenian girls repeatedly talk about bars and clubs as inappropriate for women because 'they are dangerous', a site of 'drugs, criminals and prostitutes'. In this context, girls have produced maps that document contours of safety and danger. However, these maps do not merely correlate to gendered or ethnic identities; they show the ways in which young people combine available forms of social knowledge in the use of spaces (Back, 2007). This 'rejection' of bars and clubs as a chosen space of youth sociality may be seen as a resistance to global influences. Yet not all global influences are resisted by young Armenians, only those perceived to be 'negative'.

Another cultural aspect can be found in a different meaning of space. Armenians have close kinship relations and it is not unusual to invite someone to one's home.[3] Even when parents are at home it appears that young people do not feel the need for privacy. One's room or kitchen is private enough to have a friend around. In the technological age, the internet and mobile phones provide another means to create a space where one can communicate with others. Most of the research participants had access to the internet and mobile phones at the time of the fieldwork. Compared with young people in Russia in the 1990s, when it was important for them to claim their own space by spending their time in the public spaces of the city (Pilkington, 2002), for young Armenians today there are many more opportunities to claim their own space.

For young Armenians, 'going to the park' is part of their leisure strategy. While for some Armenian girls 'going to the park' is a strategy for overcoming 'restrictions' and participating in a mixed company, for others it is simply a chance for a healthy walk. The park provides an opportunity to be together, talk and listen to music. The music I have heard on those occasions includes Russian and Armenian pop music as well as international pop music. In Krasnodar there are many parks, and young Armenian women often choose the park closest to where they live. Nonetheless, it is commonly accepted that there are also some parks which have become 'ethnic territories'. For example, the *Park*

40 Let Pobedy (Literally translates as Park in Commemoration of the 40 Years of Victory), is where many young Armenians get together. There is also *Park Gor'kogo* (Gorkii Park), which is considered to be Adyghean territory, and finally, there is *Park 30 Let Oktiabria* (Literally translates as Park in Commemoration of the 30 Years of October) which is 'Georgian territory'. Although stories about ethnic gatherings in parks were encountered among the participants, they are more popular among teenagers. Those older than 20 talked about, but had lost interest, in these types of gatherings. When asked why these parks were ethnically coded, research participants said it was by chance, although they also noted that a few years ago many Armenians had lived in this district (*raion*).

For young Armenian adults there are some additional choices for specifically ethnocultural leisure activities. Armenian ethnocultural institutions are important for those who feel the need to engage actively in one's ethnic culture. One such space is the Armenian Church in Krasnodar. Of course, not every young Armenian person goes to the church, and those who choose not to go do so for personal reasons rather than as a conscious denial of their Armenian identity. The church is the site of a range of cultural events in addition to church services. It is a place where young people can have fun, and in the summer they may just hang around by the bench and fountain in front of the church.

Another ethnocultural space is the Centre for National Cultures in Krasnodar (*Tsentr natsional'nykh kul'tur Krasnodarskogo kraia*), which gives young people an opportunity to hang out on their own and engage with their own culture by offering Armenian dance classes or Armenian language classes.[4] Some local human rights activists would argue that the centre is a state-sponsored institution mainly trying to disguise the real problem faced by minorities from this region. Ignoring the political implications of this centre, when asked why they go there and why they want to learn Armenian dance or language**,** research participants often replied that it is important to observe one's tradition, and that nowhere else do they have such an opportunity apart from at the centre.[5] While some of the girls stated that they wanted to come to the centre because it was the only place (other than school and college) that their parents allowed them to go to, other girls maintained that it was important for them because of a feeling of belonging:

> There are only a few Armenians in Russia and they're under pressure … and we're all friends … The centre is really good for getting together … lots of people can hang around together. Well, everyone is united in one place … there's a disco for everyone … and we can hang around with friends and get to know the new ones. Well, that's so cool. (Sona, aged 17)

These spaces give young people a sense of belonging and the opportunity to experience Armenian culture in their daily practices. By and large, going to these places is a matter of choice for young Armenians; some feel the need to experience their own culture, while others avoid them. Yet these places, as befits the regional political discourse, are not ethnically exclusive. Whoever is interested can come along:

> It all depends who wants to come along. Actually, I asked her [the Russian girl] why she'd be interested in Armenian traditional dancing. You know, she said that her boyfriend was

> Adyghean and that's also a Caucasian nation. And then she told me that's why she's here – because it's just interesting for her. (Manana, aged 21)

At leisure, these young people form spaces that are not ethnically exclusive and are free of racism. Considering research participants' leisure spaces, it has been shown that they are simply not reducible to ethnic identities; rather, they depend on the ways that young people form social knowledge. The options for leisure spaces that are produced here illustrate young people's individual choices, and at the same time constraints, sometimes resulting from parents' restriction. While in some ways Armenian culture is experienced and practised in these localized ethnocultural leisure places, in other ways it is a means for young women to overcome parental restriction by using them to gain contact with young Armenian men and vice versa.

Public spaces as sites of cultural exclusion

Public spaces can become sites of cultural exclusion. Sometimes young Armenians are disturbed by the open, everyday prejudice among Krasnodar's population, especially because for most of them this is the place where they feel they belong (Ziemer, 2009). Being treated as the 'other' can happen in any daily situation, for example, in shops or on public transport:

> Sometimes when I use public transport … You know, Armenians are always guilty … that's not comfortable, when they insult your people, but you can't be rude because your upbringing doesn't allow it. You're standing there and you're listening, pretending that people don't say this sort of thing about you. (Armine, aged 21)

Physical appearance affects the way that young men are treated by public bodies such as the police (*militsiia*): one consequence is that young Armenian men are more likely than Russians to be stopped by the police. Police checks, in turn, are a consequence of the new passport and registration regime and the limits on freedom of movement introduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian *militsiia* routinely stop individuals on the street for identity checks, and do so overwhelmingly on the basis of appearance (Ossipow, 2003). Nevertheless, this has become so routinized that it is dismissed by many by saying 'that's the way it is':

> You see, you're walking along the streets, one [of us] is Caucasian, and the other two friends are Russian. A policeman approaches us and, of course, only wants to see my documents. You show him your student card, but that's not enough. Well, then he'll take you to the police station. That's the way it is. (Sargis, aged 22)

A different appearance not only affects one's treatment by the *militsiia*, it also can lead to rejection by Russians. In general, such attitudes are strongly influenced by the Russian media's negative depiction of people of Caucasian origin (cf. Roman, 2002;

Russell, 2002). In Krasnodar krai, in particular, such attitudes were formed as a result of the region's political discourse that stresses the threat of illegal migration for the region's stability, especially in relation to people with Caucasian origins, portraying them as 'not local'. This rejection can even lead to overt everyday racism in the form of openly derogatory comments directed towards non-Russian people:

> You're sitting somewhere and they say you're *chernyi* [black], why did you come here? That doesn't make you feel very comfortable. (Sargis)

The term *chernyi* in this context is derogatory and applies to any Caucasian person. Research participants complained that the Russian population does not even distinguish between different Caucasian ethnicities; for them, Caucasians are just collectively seen as non-Russians, differentiated from Russians by characteristics such as appearance or language. Thus everyday racism is addressed in general to anyone who looks or speaks differently:

> It's just that many don't distinguish – well, they see a non-Russian face and call them either Adyghean or Armenian, whatever suits best. Everyone is lumped together under one nationality. (Khachig, aged 18)

These are just a few examples of recounted incidents that make young Armenians feel excluded. As a response, some young Armenians choose to accept these incidents of everyday racism silently and refrain from openly reacting to them. In this way, it seems that they are able to defuse them. However, others respond more actively by emphasizing their own ethnic belonging during everyday interactions. The next excerpt shows a form of active response:

> Despite the fact that we live in Russia, it doesn't matter … if I have contact with Russians, it doesn't matter … when we go out somewhere, to a café, and they're playing music there anyway, I always have my CD with Armenian music with me, and put it on so that everyone can listen to it. With Russians, when we talk, it doesn't matter – they always respect me and they respect Armenians. I make sure that they always respect the Armenian nation. (Sona)

Whereas Sona maintains that it is important for her to acknowledge her nationality (even though she thinks it is insignificant for forming friends), Gaiane considers it important not to display too much of her nationality in everyday interactions at university. She thinks that this is not necessary because it serves no purpose in everyday interaction. Nonetheless, her position can be interpreted as a strategy for maintaining her ethnic identification, while being selective about those situations in which to display ethnic belonging:

> Why do I have this attitude [not to display too much of her nationality in everyday interactions]? Because I live among Russians anyway. I live in Russia. No one says that I'm

> Armenian, because I don't give anything away. I keep my nationality to myself. I express my nationality only when I'm with other nationalities ... I never speak my mother tongue in public places because that's uncivilised, just uncivilised. In the presence of a person who can't understand my language, I'll never speak in my language ... if I speak to my Mum on the phone, I speak Armenian. (Gaiane, aged 20)

At the same time, Gaiane criticizes young Armenian men, who like to display their nationality and thus often create negative stereotypes:

> But our Armenian [lads], what do they do? In the car, the window is open, their music is so loud in the car that you can hear it 3km away. But why? Excuse me, but if I was Russian, I'd hit him myself. It's irritating.

This behaviour is not unusual for young men. Other published research shows that young men like to adopt certain 'racialised' styles to show their 'desired' masculinity (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000). Sewell (1996) maintains that some African Caribbean boys express their disillusionment and opposition to school in terms of black 'nationalist' ideology, which is often articulated in music, dance and demeanour. Furthermore, O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) show that Indian and Pakistani boys, as well as English and African Caribbean boys, often cite national or ethnic heroes and rituals, such as sporting and musical rituals, as reference points for a desired masculinity. Nonetheless, the exposed self-defined 'masculine' behaviour of some young men encourages resentment and the formation of stereotypes among the Russian population. These stereotypes cut across all Caucasian ethnicities. In 2007, it was reported that 30 percent of survey respondents considered the 'provocative behaviour' of national minorities to be the cause of nationalism in contemporary Russia, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. What is the main reason for nationalism in Russia today? (% of survey respondents)

	2002	2007
National prejudice of the Russian population	7	8
Provocative behaviour of national minorities	25	30
Poor living conditions in Russia	34	31
The authorities can't deal with the outbreak of nationalism	12	12
The authorities are interested in the exaggeration of nationalism	7	9
Don't know	15	10

Source: Levada Centre, 25 July 2007, available at: www.levada.ru/press/2007072500.html. The data is based on a representative survey of 1600 Russian citizens. The statistical error does not exceed 3 percent.

Another commonly accepted aspect of everyday prejudice relates to the treatment of members of ethnic minorities in the education system:

> In some of the institutions of higher education, there are people teaching, who don't like *natsmeny* [national minorities]. And they always pick on you and don't always let you pass your exam … Can you imagine, once the dean of the university said to my cousin that he should leave and work at the market? (Anahit, aged 22)

> One day, I went to the library in my district … the librarian looked strangely at me and was very unfriendly. When I wanted to get a book, she looked at me and said, 'I thought you lot couldn't read Russian. Don't you want to go back to the market and sell things? Why would you want to come to this library?' (Manana)

Whereas in Britain, for example, such attitudes are regarded as unacceptable, the public discourse in Krasnodar makes them ordinary and everyday. While in Western democracies, young people may well be encouraged to seek legal redress to counter specific examples of open discrimination, in Krasnodar, young adults appear to accept and tolerate it, having an attitude of 'that's the way it is', that 'there will always be people who don't like *natsmeny*'. While this may suggest that Armenians in Krasnodar are passively accepting of racial discrimination, it is argued here that their response is deeply infused with Armenian tradition, which teaches that rudeness and conflict are inappropriate.

In addition to these incidents of everyday xenophobia and prejudice, there is also the often talked about threat of 'skinheads'. I stress the problem of skinheads in this article mainly for two reasons: first, because this is a problem that affects the whole of Russia and has received substantial media coverage (see e.g. Raskin, 2006; Shargunov, 2002). In 2007, there were 327 racist attacks, which is an increase of 42 percent in comparison to 2006 (source: SOVA Center, http://sova-center.ru). Second, when asking the participants about their experiences of discrimination, this was the first issue that they raised.

The Armenian community in Krasnodar krai has suffered violent racist attacks in the past. For example, in 1996 Cossacks sporadically violated Armenian businesses, homes and cultural monuments (Giragosian, 2002). In April 2002, an Armenian cemetery was vandalised, and although this incident received substantial media coverage, it was largely dismissed as an isolated occurrence of 'football hooliganism' (Demchenko and Petrosian 2002: 2). However, for young Armenians this story is a story about skinhead violence, which elicited ethnic solidarity among *natsmeny* in this part of Russia as a response:

> When skinheads in Krasnodar … demolished an Armenian cemetery, many of our lads together with Adygheans went to kick their arses … a cemetery is the most holy place. Everyone helped. They really beat them up. They named a place and then they had a fight … I know that they got what they deserved. It's outrageous that these skinheads demolished the headstones of our forefathers. It's terrible. (Temine, aged 19)

This solidarity evokes an identity that is ethnically inclusive, rooted in a Caucasian identity that posits ethnic difference as insignificant and envisages all *natsmeny* as affected by the problem. In Russia today, skinheads have become a kind of 'folk devil' because of media coverage (cf. Pilkington et al., 2010). In this way an everyday fear has

been created, which has become routinized and generated common perceptions of skinheads among young people, regardless of whether they are formed via direct or second-hand experiences. The examples below show the extent to which these young adults use generalizations such as 'They are criminals' and 'they only attack non-Russians':

> I know that skinheads attack everyone who's not Russian, and I'm not Russian. You can see that in my appearance. If you like, I've got dark hair and brown eyes. Well, any nation has got distinct characteristics, such as Armenians, Georgians or Adygheans … It doesn't matter really, but they only attack non-Russians … I knew a girl who was in a *marshrutka* [fixed-route taxi] and fell asleep, woke up because everyone around her started screaming. It turned out that skinheads had set her hair on fire. (Manana)

> They are criminals. No one pays attention to them. So we all got together … they just want to wind you up to start a fight, well you see … they say a few words … they're getting more insulting … and then, bang! … If you're in the tram it's better to just leave. (Sargis)

This everyday fear even means that young Armenians would stay at home on Hitler's birthday because they know that it would be too dangerous to go out on the streets:

> Well, they say, that for non-Russians it's better not to leave the house on these days [she refers to Hitler's birthday in April] because they're like cockroaches … Imagine 50 skinheads and you're a girl on your own. (Armine)

From this example it becomes obvious that Armine has already taken precautionary measures in not leaving the house on Hitler's birthday; however, not all of her ideas are based on personal experience, as in 'they say', but presumably what she had heard on TV or had read in the press.

The stories I have examined here construct an inclusive identity. This is when all ethnic minorities are united. Their Caucasian identity comes to the fore, but not their Armenian ethnic identity. The participants seem to know that skinheads do not distinguish between different ethnic peoples, thus they do not take it as an attack against their Armenian ethnic belonging; rather, they take it as an attack against various ethnic groups. Hence it is not all about ethnic identity but more about the supra-ethnic (Caucasian) identity:

> Well, in Russia it doesn't matter, there are only a few Armenians – it sort of means that they're under pressure. You're in your homeland but it doesn't matter, you're still under pressure … Well, we're all friends … Caucasian people … like brothers and sisters … that's normal for us … we're all united. (Manana)

Conclusions

This ethnography illustrates a complex relationship between youth cultural identities and place. The analysis has shown the ways that young Armenians develop tactics to live with and through difference in a place such as Krasnodar. The ways that the participants make use of public spaces in Krasnodar demonstrates how these young people have appropriated the contradictory regional political discourse in their everyday lives.

Nonetheless, overall the participants have constructed an inclusive notion of identity which helps them to overcome these contradictions deriving from their ethnic belonging in everyday lives. Even when experiencing racism and xenophobia, young Armenians form an inclusive identity, referring to all *natsmeny*, despite cultural differences. This situational identity may well be called 'Caucasian brotherhood', and can be read as a response to this external threat: a redefinition of 'us' through the supra-ethnic category of 'Caucasian' in relation to the 'other'. Such an outcome might be viewed as the result of the historical tradition of cultural mixing in the Caucasus region.

Notes

1. Note that although the pseudonyms used for research participants in this article (in order to protect their anonymity) are traditional Armenian first names, their real first names were often Russian or something similar.
2. In Krasnodar, all schools are ethnically mixed, but the precise nature of ethnic mix varies from school to school.
3. Close kinship relations are a cultural characteristic that cuts across all Caucasian peoples.
4. There are many other organizations that organize Armenian cultural events and language classes where young people can go, such as Armianskaia Pashkovskaia Obshchina (APO).
5. That they chose this centre for language and dance classes was largely dependent on geographical location. The APO is quite far away from the city centre. As some of the girls lived in an opposite *raion*, attending dance or language classes in the APO could involve a journey of more than an hour.

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